

PAUL MASON



The Cupboard
Under the Stairs

A Boy Trapped in Hell . . .

About the Author

Paul Mason is a writer. He also delivers victim-focused training and inspirational talks to professionals and support agencies working in the field of child sexual abuse. He has helped influence service standards for male victims of abuse. As part of his voluntary work, he created and subsidised the influential Systematic Abuse of Males (SAM) programme, for which he won the Una Padel Outstanding Individual of the Year award for 2009, presented by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. He now lives on an island with his three dogs.

THE CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS

A Boy Trapped in Hell ...

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Enjoy life, but be attentive. Don't think there are no beasts
just because the forest is silent.

Acknowledgements

This has been a difficult book to write, not only because it contains my innermost thoughts and details of what happened to me throughout my life but also because it primarily concerns my blood-relative family. Although he is no longer with us, I love my brother as much as any brother could. Likewise, even though as a child I did not understand her behaviour, my mother will remain someone whom I love and for whom I have much sympathy. Like many others, she was a victim of a monster who called himself a father.

I know that there will be some who read this book and condemn it as a breach of privacy and perhaps trust, a story that should never have been shared or put into print. While I can understand that some people would prefer that this difficult subject was not openly discussed, the truth of the matter is that if we are to save children from suffering or help victims to recover, then there is a need to know and understand as much as we can about paedophiles and child sex offenders and the true legacy of their vile actions. I have not sensationalised my life or the incidents that fill it, and nor have I ever wanted to. What you read here is the product of a lifetime's experience; it is the grim reality of a nightmarish existence. I feel certain that similar abuse is happening to other children right now.

The vast majority of people who have endured child sexual abuse have no objection to being called 'victims'. It is a popular misconception, created by those working in the support network field, that instead we like to be categorised as 'survivors'. It's absolute nonsense and political

correctness gone wild. As far as I am aware, the last thing any abused person concerns themselves with is what they are classed as, a victim or a survivor. Ultimately, we are all human beings. No one, especially an innocent child, deserves to be manipulated, imprisoned and abused by a parent, guardian or any adult. I use the term 'victim' frequently in this book, not because I am seeking sympathy or because it's an emotive term, but because that is what anyone who suffers unwarranted abuse or harm is: a victim.

I have written several books on various subjects, and ordinarily I can produce pages of people who merit thanks for their positive part in the creation of the work; in this instance, writing the acknowledgements is a far more difficult exercise. Some people, for obvious reasons, I prefer not to name, so that their privacy is maintained. I have deliberately kept many of the people mentioned in these pages as anonymous as is possible. That is my wish, not anyone else's, and I do it out of respect for them and their families.

My two wonderful children have been there beside me for every step of this difficult journey. A thank you is not enough. The greatest accolade I can give is that I trust you and I will always love you. I want to thank Detective Sergeant Chris Churchman of the Metropolitan Police. If a man could ever be described as an angel, then it is he. My mistrust of the police and the prosecutorial legal system they operate within (not the judiciary) is not without reason. It is not the result of bitterness, paranoia or animosity. For more than three decades, I was a serving police officer and during that time I witnessed all kinds of corruption, unlawful activities and deliberate incompetence, all supposedly in the name of the law. Chris Churchman, however, is the consummate professional. If any police force should ever wish to seek guidance on how to treat and properly deal with a victim of child sexual abuse, then I would beg them to seek out Chris. Throughout the police investigation, he

was a beacon shining brightly above the sea of investigative bureaucracy and legal jargon that often defies logic. Of one thing I am certain: if more police officers adopted his approach, more victims would come forward and speak out and more sexually motivated crime would be solved. Had it not been for Chris, I might well have given up on pursuing my case.

I also want to mention (not thank or praise) the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Their crass and inept attitude and lack of understanding was unbelievable, a great example of how lopsided the English legal system is, falling on the side of the paedophile because the case was historical and therefore some witnesses were ill or dead. They failed me by allowing my father to walk away free. Even the police were alarmed by their decision not to prosecute.

Looking back over my life, I see that there have been several positive influences that have kept me focused on everyday living, not least the actor Adam West, who is best known for his portrayal of the Caped Crusader, Batman. For me, there is no other actor who portrayed Batman and the fight between good and evil as accurately as he did. Had Bob Kane and Bill Finger never initially created Batman, the likelihood is I would not be writing these words. It was Batman who helped me survive my childhood, so I place on record my appreciation to those three individuals and pledge my lifelong allegiance to Batman.

As I grew out of childhood, I found new heroes, those representing Leeds United football club. Despite having had a professional association (books and various writings) with what was at the time my local team (Carlisle FC), my real passion has always been Leeds United. Elland Road became my surrogate home, a place where I felt part of a unique family, where no one judged or ostracised me, a place where I could scream with joy and elation, or, in more recent times, frustration. The late Bill Shankly was right when he said football was much more than a game; for me, it

provided a life. I am proud to wear the mark of Leeds United permanently, in the shape of a tattoo on my left arm. Leeds is a city where I once lived and served in the police force, the place where my daughter was born and which my son visits every other week of the football season. It's the greatest city in the world and, for me, that stems from its football team: marching on together.

I want to say a big thank you to Bill Campbell and his excellent team at Mainstream, who have provided support throughout the work and kept me focused on the task. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Finally, I hope this book provides hope and inspiration for the many thousands of victims of child sexual abuse across the world. It's a harrowing and often arduous journey we make, with more dead ends than open highways. Despite everything (and in my case that includes the obvious failures of the English legal system in the form of the CPS), we must keep travelling the route, always looking forward and never behind, never standing still until we know we are safe. Sometimes we may feel as though the light at the end of the tunnel is nothing more than another steam train thundering towards us, ready to plough into us and take us back to a place we no longer choose to be. But that's what is important. We *do* have freedom of choice. We can achieve, and no, we aren't different; it's society that has the problem, not us. If we don't stand tall and proud, express our concerns and tell our stories, no matter how unpalatable they may be to others, the world will never know. Together, we can do it.

Paul Mason
April 2013

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Introduction

'Please, Dad, please, please let me out. I don't like it. I'm frightened. I'm scared. Please, Dad, please let me out.' My frantic pleas went unheeded. No matter how much I sobbed and begged to be let out, every scream, cry and noise I made was totally ignored. As a three-year-old child, an innocent little boy, my crime had been to live, to be born to a vile and disgusting man who portrayed himself as a paragon of virtue, a father and a highly respected serving police officer.

This was the first time I had been put in the cupboard under the stairs. It was a place I feared; for me, it had the reputation and appearance of a dark and dingy hole. My father would constantly remind me and my older brother, John, that it was the entrance to hell. 'That's the place where naughty boys are put. At the very back lives the Devil. He drags naughty little boys from there down into the ground and into hell.' You can imagine the fear that the mere mention of that place induced. He would regularly use it as a frightener, staring at us with mean intent, then glancing towards the crooked door that was the entrance to the cupboard under the stairs.

What an absolutely vile thing for a father to tell his sons. No normal parent would consider tormenting the minds of young, innocent children so peculiarly. But my father was no ordinary person; he was evil personified, an absolute bastard of a man. I will no longer refer to him in this work as 'dad' or 'father'. In real life, my brother and I called him 'it' or 'Jack', so, from here, I will refer to that person as 'Jack'.

On that day, I had been sitting in the living room and, as had become normal practice, I tried to remain invisible to him, since even at that tender age I knew that he didn't like me or want me around him. Jack made it clear to me that I was anything but wanted. He would constantly remind me that 'little boys should be seen and not heard'.

This time, I had been ordered to sit on the floor in front of him, close to a roaring coal fire. I was stripped naked and had no idea of what was to come. He sat close to me, almost crouching over me. I can vividly remember the sickly smell of stale cigarette smoke that seemed to be a part of him and oozed from his skin and mouth, caused by a lifetime of relentless smoking, 50 or 60 a day. More importantly for me, I recall every word he uttered to me that day and I can still see the hatred he held for me in his cold, black-looking eyes as he began his personal crusade for complete control of a small child, his own son.

'Do you know how much you get on my tits? You are a real pain in the arse. You're the little boy who isn't wanted. You shouldn't be here. You shouldn't exist,' he told me. Although I was a young child, I was able to understand the meaning of those words. They served their purpose. Each time he reminded me of these facts, I became more subservient to him, feeling I should be grateful to him for giving me life. I was scared because, naively, I thought he was going to send me back to the place where he had first found me, the shop or wherever it might have been that he had got me from. Worse still, maybe he would send me to meet the Devil in the cupboard under the stairs. That cupboard - its contents and all it stood for - still terrifies me to this day. The fear of incarceration in a dark, confined space has ruled much of my life. I'm not ashamed to say that I am scared of the dark and all the shadowy secrets it holds.

The absence of paternal love and affection in the three short years of my existence had caused me to believe that I was nothing more than a toy to him, not even human, let

alone a little boy with a child's needs, feelings and emotions. My role in life was to be an object of derision and a whipping-boy he could shout at or slap, punch or kick whenever he was angry or upset about something, which seemed to be much of the time. It didn't necessarily have to be me who caused him pain or grief; I was simply the punchbag on which he could vent his aggression.

On the occasion in question, I innocently asked him why, if he didn't want me, had he got me. I didn't like the way he made me feel and desperately wanted to stop doing whatever it was that made him despise me so much. All I really wanted was for him to pick me up and give me a caring cuddle, to make me feel loved and wanted and a part of the family, rather than something to be ignored. 'Get you?' he roared back at me. 'I didn't get you. I wouldn't want something as pathetic as you. We didn't get you. You were presented to us. You came from here.' He was pointing at his trousers.

I had done it again, agitated and upset him. He rose to his feet, fumbling at the fly of his trousers, before pulling out his penis. 'You came out of here. That's the end of my cock. Like wee, you were pissed out.' He made me stand up. 'Kiss my cock. Kiss the end of my cock, you little bastard. See what it tastes like. This is where you came from. This is part of you.'

Without warning, he grabbed hold of my head with both of his hands and pulled my face towards his penis. 'Kiss it, I said,' he yelled. I didn't want to go anywhere near the thing, yet I knew it was something I had to do. I had seen my mother and my brother kissing it, my mother when they were in bed and Jack had asked me to get in beside them, and my brother in the bathroom, so I accepted that it was part of my life, something we all had to do to him. I moved forward and quickly kissed its end and instantly pulled my head away. The smell of stale wee and cigarettes was sickening.

‘Do it again. This time, put it in your mouth or I’ll have to force it in there.’ Again, he yanked my head towards him. With one hand, he was stroking it up and down, and I remember thinking how ugly it looked. I hoped my own would never look or smell so awful. I became anxious and began to cry. I begged him to let me go, but he had his other hand clamped firmly round the back of my neck and lower head. ‘Put the fucking thing in your mouth,’ he demanded. Something inside told me that if I did this, my life would never be the same, yet I had no alternative. I closed my eyes, opened my mouth and felt it go inside. He jerked it forward and shouted at me, ‘Suck it, suck it.’ It was horrible. It tasted salty and he had shoved it so far into my throat that it made me gag.

Instinctively, I pulled away and dropped to the safety of the floor, pleading with him to leave me alone. Looking up, I saw him stroking it with faster and more vigorous movements. His facial expression changed from one of anger and hatred to one of pleasure. Before I knew it, he ejaculated all over my naked body. I moved to get out of its way and some fell onto the fireside rug where I lay.

‘You stupid little boy, why did you move?’ he said, wiping the end of his penis with a handkerchief, which he immediately put back into his trouser pocket. He was panting like a dog as he crouched over me. ‘Look at me and listen. I didn’t want you, nor did your mother, nor does anyone else. You are here because no one else wanted you, so you have to do everything I say. You are mine, do you understand that? You are a replacement child.’

I felt scared and confused. I didn’t understand what he meant, so I asked him. ‘You are nothing more than a replacement for my little boy who is no longer with us. He was my little boy. His name was Robert. If he had been here, you wouldn’t exist. The only reason you are here is because the doctor told me to have another child. You were never wanted or needed. Do you understand? You are a

replacement child. Remember that for the rest of your life. You are the little boy who nobody wanted. No one will ever take any notice of you or believe anything you say. You will always be second best.'

I still wasn't certain what he meant by all of this. However, I wanted to know more about Robert and where he was now, so again I asked. 'How dare you mention a thing like that to me? Robert was my son. He is nothing to do with you. I don't ever want to hear you mention his name again. You won't speak of him again, do you understand? You are nothing to this family, so don't ever talk of him again.'

In my innocence, I had expected Jack to say something along the lines of Robert had moved away or he was in heaven; instead, I received more threats. Again, I asked where Robert was and why he was no longer here. That was it, without warning, Jack picked up a metal ruler, which he often used for drawings of electrical diagrams, from a nearby table. He raised it in the air above my head and smacked it down onto my scalp. He held it side-on to inflict the maximum pain and damage. I felt the edge slice open my scalp and screamed out as blood instantly began to run down my face and into my eyes. I couldn't see and my head felt like it had been ripped wide open. I was inconsolable and yelling out in agony; it was the worst pain imaginable.

My crying and screaming were my downfall. He lifted me from the floor and put me under his arm. 'I told you not to mention his name again. Robert is dead. Now that's it. You know where you're going now, don't you? You're going to meet the Devil. Unless you shut up, he'll come and get you. Now be quiet.' In one movement, he pulled open the door and threw me into the place I so feared: the cupboard under the stairs. I had barely landed on the concrete floor when the door slammed shut behind me and the bolt slid across to prevent my escape.

It was pitch black in there and I was petrified. It was as cold, dark and inhospitable as I had imagined it to be. My

cries went unheeded. I felt suffocated by the gloom of that rotten place. The blood continued to drip down my face and, with no clothes to wipe it away with, I was forced to use my arms and hands to clear it. My vision was impaired by blood, tears and above all darkness. I was shaking with fear and sobbing uncontrollably. Then I heard a scratching noise and a guttural groaning sound that seemed to come from the very back of the cupboard. I thought it was the Devil rising from hell and coming to get me, so I kept quiet and remained motionless. My heart was beating rapidly and I could hear it thumping in my chest. I sat as still as I could for what seemed like an eternity. I was terrified by everything in this dank and pitch-black hellhole.

Later, I could hear noises from the living room. It was Jack laughing and talking to himself as he watched the television. He had already forgotten I was there. He was right: I meant nothing to him or anyone else. Tears began to roll down my face and I felt scared and very much alone.

The legacy of the tiny cupboard under the stairs has lived with me ever since, 50 years so far. I can vividly recall every detail about it. Over a period of several years, I was to get to know the feel and shape of every brick, and the perfectly formed underside of the wooden steps that ranged from the drop of step one at the back of the cupboard, its lowest point, to step six at its highest. Every part of the rough concrete floor would at one time or another slice open the skin of my legs or knees as I scrambled about in the darkness, desperately looking for a place of comfort. It was tiny, and in all I would estimate that there was sufficient room for an old-style stand-up Hoover, a few small boxes of household clutter and very little else. This most certainly was not a place for a small child.

With one of the cupboard walls being the exterior wall of the house, it was always a cold place, an ideal home and breeding ground for creepy insects such as spiders, woodlice and earwigs, and, of course, for evil monsters. The

top edge of the wooden door ran parallel with the slope of the staircase, so that it was higher at one side than at the other. The space behind the door was the forgotten and unfriendly place that, I think, every house has, a place where no one truly likes to spend time. In many houses, it is the loft or attic space, but it can be anywhere that is dark and unwelcoming, that warrants no cleaning or decoration simply because it's not at all pleasant. I suspect that if people were asked to describe such places they would say there was something unsettling about them, even that they were haunted. These are places that make the hairs on the back of the neck stand upright and send shivers down the spine.

That's precisely how the cupboard under the stairs remains to me. It was to become my prison and a place I feared beyond every other horror in the entire world, a living hell created in a tiny house in Cumbria. A house or home should be a sanctuary, a place of safety for a small child. Instead, my family home was a shell that I still refer to as 'the place where I lived'. It was never a home to me, or to my mother or brother. It was made into a hell to satiate the deviant desires of the man who had the audacity to call himself my father, a man I feared until the day he died.

Chapter 1

The family

I was born at the Cumberland Infirmary, Carlisle, in 1959. For all too long a period of my life, it was not something I was glad of. Had I known of the absolutely hellish childhood that was to be forced on me, and the impact it would have on the rest of my life, then I probably would have chosen not to make any kind of entrance into this world.

My earliest recollections are of when I was probably about two years old, certainly no older. (Many of the incidents as they occurred were so traumatic as to remain with me throughout my childhood and adult life, and others have come back to me through therapy.) They are of seeing Jack beat my mother and, when he stepped in to stop the abuse, my brother (eight years older) was beaten too, though 'battered' seems a more appropriate word to describe the punishment Jack dished out. When I say beaten, I don't mean the odd slap or push. The attacks were violent and accompanied by loud verbal abuse; blood was almost always drawn as a result of punches or kicks.

I quickly learned from those early experiences that if you were a child or a woman, Jack was not a person to mess with. He liked to rule the roost, his home, by fear and control, nothing else. However, he wouldn't ever consider confronting another man, and I can recall not one occasion

throughout my life when he was aggressive or abusive towards a man, or any adult outside the family.

I have no memory of what precisely it was that had caused him to explode into a frenzy of rage. Sadly, I do know that such scenes happened with great frequency. It seemed that there was some sort of disharmony between him and my mam every couple of days. This would be followed by a brief period of intense love and passion between them. It was confusing to us as children, as all the bad stuff that had gone before and which we had seen or heard seemed to be instantly forgotten.

On this occasion, John and I had been playing in the back garden when we heard my mother screaming and Jack shouting abusive names at her. I think John's reaction was the reason this incident stuck in my memory. He knew I was frightened and took hold of me and gave me a comforting cuddle; he led me to the back of the garden, behind an apple tree and well away from the house. I was told to stay there until he came out to get me. John disappeared into the house, and I felt alone and not a little scared. This was my first encounter with fear and there was nowhere to run. I waited for several minutes, then decided to go into the house after him.

As I walked into the living room, I saw Jack strike my mam in the face with the back of his right hand. It made a sickening noise and my mam was knocked to the floor by the force of the blow. It was then that John jumped between them and told him to stop it. Jack lunged at him, slapping him hard around the face with his left hand, and I saw blood spurt out of John's mouth as he too dropped to the floor. It was a scene that caused my blood to run cold, and when Jack turned and glared at me, I ran out of the house and back into the garden, where John had left me. I stood there motionless for a long time. I closed my eyes tightly, blocking out the world and believing that by doing so I would become invisible to Jack and he could not hurt me.

After a while, the shouting stopped, and a little later my mam came out to me. She seemed angry and sternly told me to get back in the house and go straight to bed. I was confused by the whole episode: the violence, my mam and John being hurt by Jack, and now my mam being angry with me and telling me to go to bed. It was still daylight and nowhere near bedtime. However, I knew not to question my mam when she was clearly so upset, so I ran as fast as I could through the living room and up the stairs into the bedroom I shared with John, slamming the door closed behind me.

John was already in bed. He was sobbing and had a handkerchief in his mouth to stem the bleeding. The blow to the head that Jack had dealt him had caused him to bite into his tongue; he had bitten a hole right through it. He told me to be quiet, to get undressed and into bed as quickly as I could and to go to sleep, as I would then be free and safe. Sleep wasn't an option. My mind was in turmoil about all that I had seen. Jack was a monster. Poor John. He quietly cried and neither Mam nor Jack came to see that he was all right. We could still hear the deep tones of Jack's voice drifting up through the floorboards. I couldn't understand what was being said properly, but John could and he told me that Jack was still saying horrid things to Mam, calling her names, and she was crying and begging him to stop. I was worried that he might still be hurting her and wanted to go and check to see she was OK. John told me to stay where I was and not to worry; she would be OK and I had to go to sleep.

The following morning, nothing was said about the incidents of the day before. Mam acted as though nothing had happened and John reminded me not to ask or say a word about it. It was as if I had imagined it all, except there were bruises on Mam's face and John's. So far as first memories go, that one is pretty abhorrent. Seeing Jack act

like that towards Mam and John made me wary of him and reluctant to approach him about anything.

The house where we lived was a two-bedroom terraced house on a housing estate directly outside the main entrance to RAF Carlisle, known within the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as RAF 14MU (maintenance unit). The estate itself was called Crindledyke Estate. It consisted of just 30 houses, all pink-brick terraced properties, some with two bedrooms and some with three. The houses had been built in three separate rows. These were referred to by residents of the estate as 'the front row', 'the middle row' and 'the back row'. We lived in the back row, furthest away from the main road that ran directly in front of the estate, the A6. The back row consisted of four houses.

The estate still exists to this day and sits three miles north of Carlisle town centre. It was, in the 1960s, a beautiful environment, entirely rural. Crindledyke was surrounded by country lanes, fields and rolling hills; there were cows, sheep, trees, fresh air and very little else. The nearest shop was two miles away, and to do anything as a family, a car was needed; buses were infrequent, and while there was a station nearby, the train to Carlisle was expensive and took a long time, as it stopped at every station en route. We were the only family on the estate who had no car. Instead, Jack had a Vespa scooter and that was it. Therefore, much to his satisfaction, my mother, my brother and myself were virtually trapped on the estate.

Back in the early 1960s, every house on that estate was occupied by a male police officer and his family, all different ranks and age groups. Not one policewoman lived there. Jack was a policeman, a man who upheld the law, protected the vulnerable, defended the weak and removed the liberty of those who caused harm to others. Sounds very impressive when you say it like that, doesn't it? The reality is, Jack was an utter bastard to his family. Yet, outside the family home, he was apparently respected by his peers and

regarded as someone who could turn his hand to most things and do a good job. In his spare time, he repaired televisions, radios and occasionally watches, the last being something he'd learned from his own father.

I can remember fortnightly visits to see Jack's parents, my grandparents, who lived in a suburb of Carlisle called Stanwix. It was always a Sunday when we visited. Jack would make us walk two miles from Crindledyke to their bungalow in Briar Bank. My granny, as I was to call her, clearly had no time for me. Nor did my grandad, although, when he wasn't drunk, he would allow me to sit with him while he repaired watches. More often than not, I was ignored. I would be given an old tennis ball and sent out in all weathers to play on an area of grass that lay behind their home. John would be allowed to remain in the bungalow and given biscuits and cake. He would sneak some of the biscuits out and give them to me during the walk home. Naturally, I didn't like visiting them at all.

My grandad had at one time been a police officer. Later, he turned to watch repairs and, from what I have heard, spent a great deal of time in the bookmaker's. He and Jack looked very alike: gnarled and bitter and twisted faces and an arrogant air. They were cold and calculating individuals, without a care for anyone or anything but themselves.

As far as I can recall, my granny originally hailed from Edinburgh and had been a nurse of some kind. By the time I was a child, she did nothing but sit looking into the coal fire in the tiny living room of their bungalow. I am saddened to say that I have no fond memories of these people. They didn't seem like family at all, and I recall that at Easter and Christmas and on birthdays they never sent cards or presents. It's a sad indictment of our relationship that when they passed away I felt no great emotion, and nor did John. I have never visited or felt the urge to visit either's grave.

My mother, Mary, worked part time on a fruit and vegetable stall in Carlisle market. She would catch a bus to

get to and from town. Jack didn't like this, as he had no control over her when she was at work, and there were many arguments between them about it. One such disagreement came about when Jack told my mam she had to resign because the family who owned the fruit and vegetable stall were a bad influence on her. At the time, I had no idea what this meant; now, looking back, I can understand that they could see how unhappy she was in her marriage and tried to suggest options for her. The family who owned the stall were always friendly to me and John, and later in life I was to learn from them that they saw Jack for what he was: a bully and a bastard to his wife and family. So much influence did Jack hold and so manipulative was he that he managed to get Mam a job at RAF 14MU as a packer, basically packing RAF equipment into containers to be shipped around the world. I remember she worked in 'A' Shed. These sheds were huge aircraft-hangar-type buildings.

My mother's side of the family were much more normal and nicer, and I know I had proper grandparents who genuinely cared, and aunties and uncles and cousins who were loyal and open. On my mother's side, there was no pretence, no falsehoods or airs and graces, just honest family.

I called my grandparents on my mam's side Nanna and Grandad. They lived in Sheehan Crescent, Raffles, a rough, tough housing estate in Carlisle that had been forgotten by the local council and authorities. It wasn't a picturesque sort of place; instead of flowers, many front gardens were filled with washing machines, spin dryers, car parts and detritus of all types, yet despite this, or what anyone in authority might say, the people of Raffles were devoutly loyal to their own. Sure, there were bad sorts, mainly drunken fighters, and therefore the residents of the area were often regarded as the hardest in Carlisle. The Sheehan Crescent I knew as a child no longer exists in its original form; the houses are long gone, demolished by the council.

My memories of Raffles are good. When I was taken there as a child, my nanna and grandad always made us feel very welcome. The other families and children who lived in Sheehan Crescent and in nearby Dobinson Road were always pleasant to me and John, recognising us as members of a local family. Our visits were all the more pleasurable because more often than not Jack wouldn't go to Raffles. I think he found it intimidating - it was full of 'criminals and crap', he would say - so it was generally my mam who took us there. We would have to catch one bus to get us from Crindledyke into Carlisle town centre, then another out to Orton Road, Raffles, so it was always something of an adventure. Nanna would be waiting for us and welcome us with a big hug and kiss before sitting me, as the smallest child, on her knee and regaling me with stories about her own life and my mother.

One detail came to the fore in many of her stories: her strong dislike of Jack. She would repeat her mantra that he was 'a shit of a man' and tell John and me how she had never wanted our mam to marry him. One story she would tell us was about one of his rare visits to Raffles and how she threw him out of the house because of his horrible behaviour. Apparently he had given John a good hiding, causing my grandad to pin him up against the wall and threaten to batter him if he touched a child like that again. Typically, Jack didn't fight back against a man. Instead, when he was shown the door, he stood outside at a safe distance and threatened to get the police round because my nanna and grandad had assaulted him! He shouted that if my mother wanted to remain married to him and see the children again, she would have to leave with him. My nanna would say that my mam had no choice; the threat of losing her home and her children was too strong, so she went with him.

There were times when my mother's family didn't get to see my mam, John or me, all because Jack wouldn't allow

contact of any sort. In the end, my uncle sorted things out and some reconciliation was achieved, but it was never completely resolved. Nanna would get very upset and cry when she told us these stories. The intense hatred she felt for Jack is something that will live with me for ever. It wasn't helped by the fact that he had said to her that he despised children because they were a drain on time, energy and resources. Children were hugely important to her. I loved Nanna. She would tell me to forgive my mam for not being able to give us enough attention, that it was because she was scared of Jack and he demanded too much.

Grandad was a builder's labourer, but I remember him for the fantastic things he would create from a solitary piece of wood: toy ships and boats, and even a lorry. It was amazing to watch him whittle away at a wooden clothes-peg and transform it into a submarine or a Grenadier Guard-style soldier.

I loved being around Nanna and Grandad, and I learned more about proper family life from them than I ever did from Jack. Their home was a sanctuary from the outside world. I always felt safe there. In their house, there was no hidden agenda; they said it as it was.

When they passed away, I still wasn't very old; their deaths were traumatic experiences and left me feeling that something important was missing from my life. After my nanna died, there was some kind of family issue that resulted in Jack refusing to allow my mam to attend her own mother's funeral. Instead, she had to stand some distance away and observe from afar. He forbade her to grieve with her own family. The long-term outcome of this was that various elements of my mam's side of the family were never close to us again - a situation that no doubt pleased Jack, since it helped him to dominate my mam and control every aspect of her life.

John, my brother, was born in 1951, and while there were eight years between us, he was always there looking out for

me, as far back as I can remember. In hindsight, we didn't share a typical brotherly relationship. I think we were both too damaged for that. However, he was very protective of me and would always put himself in the firing line if it would prevent me from being hurt. I suspect he did likewise for Robert when he was alive. As I grew older, I realised that John had a hatred of confrontation; he would sooner run from a fight than get involved. Yet I have so many recollections of him, throughout my childhood, voluntarily taking beatings and various forms of punishment from Jack in order to defend me or our mam.

John first mentioned Robert's death to me when I was about three or four. From the first time Jack ever said Robert's name to me, and that I was a replacement, I was curious to know more. I wanted to understand why God would take a child. Much of my early knowledge of the Mason family history was gleaned from secret bedtime discussions with John, whispers in the night that conjured all kinds of horrific images. I couldn't know that nothing my childish imagination could create would be worse than the reality of what was to come in future years.

Robert was born in 1955. At this time, the family lived in Cliff Road, Sandysike, near Longtown, a place that's closer to the Scottish Borders than to Carlisle. As on Crindledyke Estate, all the properties here were police houses, occupied by policemen and their families. Having visited Sandysike and the row of houses that remains, the main thing that strikes me about the place is its remoteness. It's simply two blocks of terraced houses that, to all intents and purposes, have been dropped in the middle of nowhere. Local history records that they were connected with the War Office and the long-defunct RAF Longtown, an airfield that came into being in 1941 and ceased to be used after the end of the Second World War.

Cliff Road was a turning directly off the main A7 trunk road, although in more recent times it has been bypassed

by a newer section of the A7, which must have made the houses seem even more remote. Cliff Road itself is quiet - it doesn't lead to anywhere in particular - and back in the 1950s one imagines there was very little traffic. It was there that my parents lived with John and Robert. John always told me that it was a scary place to live and how he dreaded the night. The two rows of houses were lit by a few streetlights, but the surrounding area was bleak and very dark.

I know relatively little of the life they led there, but John would tell me that shouting and beatings were very much part of the existence that Jack forced upon his family. He was selfish and uncaring, and it was all about him being the master, the sole voice of any importance. John explained to me that Robert was very frightened of Jack and said he didn't like it when he was taken into Jack's bedroom on his own.

Nanna often mentioned Robert. She described Robert as being like a little angel, a smiling happy little boy, until Jack's influence took hold. Then he became quiet and tearful. She would tell me that she wanted to take John and him away from Jack, to live with them in Raffles, where they could be safe and happy. She said that when my mam brought John and Robert round to visit, they would often sit on her knee and cry and say they didn't want to go home. I always felt the same when visiting her.

At the time Robert died, Jack had effectively ostracised my mother from everyone. Cliff Road was not the sort of place that was easily accessible. The family had no telephone and the only person who maintained regular contact with the world beyond Sandysike was Jack.

The story of Robert's death remains as sad to me now as it was back when I first heard it as a small child. I have managed to piece the tale together, mainly through listening to my mother and John. Jack never said much to me about it; he just used to issue threats such as: 'If you

don't do as I tell you, you will end up dead like Robert.' I know he spoke to John about it, though.

It seems that on 20 September 1958 Robert was out playing in a field in front of the house, across Cliff Road and perhaps 60 yards from the house. He was apparently playing with some teenagers. I have never found out who these people were. John could not remember Robert playing in the field and said it was more normal for them to be playing in the back garden of the house.

Whatever the circumstances, the group were playing and Robert was somehow involved. An object had been thrown or kicked into a static water tank in the same field. This was MoD property and must have been ineffectively fenced off, since Robert was able to gain access to it. It was the sort of tank that one often sees elevated above buildings on government bases. It was made up of different bolted-together sections and panels and was about five feet tall, twenty feet long and eight feet wide.

For some unknown reason, Robert went to retrieve the object. None of the group playing thought anything of it, apparently, and let him, a three-year-old child, climb into the tank to recover it. Now, the dangers and difficulties facing a small child trying to retrieve an object from deep water should be obvious to anyone, even a group of teenagers.

According to Jack's version of events, relayed to me by John, one of the group came running to the house and told him Robert had fallen into the tank. Jack apparently got him out and gave him the kiss of life. The doctor had been called, and when he arrived and saw Jack giving the kiss of life to Robert, he placed his hand on Jack's shoulder and said, 'Jack, he is gone. Get Mary pregnant again as soon as you can, so you can replace Robert.' I am that replacement child.

In recent years, I have tried to find out more about Robert's death, but without much success. I have obtained a

copy of his death certificate. It clearly states on the document that no post-mortem was carried out. Officials I have spoken to say this is strange, since the death wasn't the result of natural causes. A coroner can order a postmortem when death has been the result of an accident or unusual circumstance, yet on this occasion, none was held. The death certificate merely states, 'Accidental death through drowning.' Despite my best efforts, I have been unable to locate a police report or a record of an inquest.

Chapter 2

Welcome to hell

Life at Crindledyke Estate was anything but harmonious. Looking back, it was chaotic. There always seemed to be some kind of crisis or fall-out that had to be dealt with. I quickly learned during my early years that Jack's mantra, 'Little boys should be seen and not heard', was advice that needed to be adhered to in his presence, especially when I was alone with him. As a policeman, he worked shifts, and it didn't take me long to work out when he was and wasn't going to be around. When he wasn't there, it was like a great cloud of gloom, doom and depression had been lifted from the house. The fear his very presence created evaporated and the atmosphere was totally different.

It's difficult to describe how one person can control the emotions of an entire family and influence the others' every thought, every waking moment. That was what Jack was excellent at. None of us ever knew where we stood with him. His mood swings were incredible. One moment he seemed OK, the next he was stomping around the house, swearing and lashing out at us.

Our next-door neighbours were a couple called Mollie and Eddie. Their children had grown up and moved away. They always seemed like a friendly couple, and when I used to play out in the garden, Mollie would ask how we all were